GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
AGRICULTURE
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1228
ANSWERED ON:26.11.2007
LOCAL SEEDS
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Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the research findings and impact of Genetically Modified (GM) seeds in production of crops and vegetables;

(b) the reaction of farmers from different States in favour or against GM technology and steps taken to educate farmers about the new technology;

(c) whether the Government proposes to allow trials of GM food and vegetable production with adequate safeguards and take steps to study and generate data on socio-economic impact of large scale production of GM crops, food and vegetables by taking farmers and consumers into confidence;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether the farmers are being discouraged to use the local seeds and to exchange them with other farmers; and

(f) if so, the details thereof alongwith the steps taken to preserve all varieties of local seeds?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA)

(a) Bt cotton, the first Genetically Modified (GM) seed, has been made available to Indian farmers since 2002. Visible impact of Bt cotton has been observed in terms of its inbuilt potentiality to resist target insect pest, diseases and imparting other nutritional qualities and thereby increasing the productivity. The performance of Bt cotton hybrids tested in All India Coordinated Cotton Improvement Programme were found superior to non-Bt cotton hybrids.

(b) The area under Bt. cotton has increased in the country to 34.67 lakh hectare in Kharif 2006 from 29073 hectare in Kharif 2002 after release which helped to increase the production and productivity in the country. Following steps have been taken to educate farmers about the new technology:-

i) The Deptt of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India has provided financial assistance to Biotech Consortium India Ltd., New Delhi during 2006-07 to organize awareness workshops in nine states on the issues related to Genetically Modified Crops with a focus on post released monitoring of Bt. cotton.
ii) The transgenic cotton seed growers organize farmers` awareness camps/days to educate farmers about the new technology.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) The field trials of GM crops are permitted by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) of Ministry of Environment and Forests on the recommendation of Review Committee of Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) / Department of Bio-technology (DBT) of Ministry of Science and Technology subject to the following conditions:-

i. The applicant should maintain an isolation distance of 200 m and where the Indian Minimum Seed Standards certification mandates a higher distance, the same shall be complied with.
ii. The applicant should submit a validated event specific test protocol before undertaking the trials.
iii. The applicant should submit the name of the lead scientist who would be responsible for conducting the trial.
iv. Multi-Location Research Trials (MLRT) for new events should not be conducted in the farmers` field. MLRT should be undertaken by the Companies/ Institutions either in their own premises, research farms, long leased land (minimum of 3 years) or at the SAU/ICAR institutions.

(e) Seeds Act, 1966, Seed Rules, 1968 and Protection of Plant Varieties &Farmers` Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001 do not restrict farmers to use and exchange local seeds among them for sowing purposes. Farmers/farming communities are/shall be recognized in respect of their contribution for conserving, improving and making available plant genetic resources for the development of new plant varieties under the provisions of PPV & FR Act, 2001. Improved varieties/hybrids of crops are being promoted to get the higher yield, better resistance quality in different crops for the benefit of the farming community.

(f) The National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), New Delhi is collecting, conserving and documenting the germplasm of

crop plants including seeds of local landraces / farmer`s varieties etc. in National Genebank. The National Genebank presently holds more than 3.50 lakh accessions of over 1,200 crop/plant species.